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SUBJECT: THE ROYAL GUESSING GAME: THE NEXT GENERATION

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: The question of the royal succession is an exquisitely sensitive one in Oman. When the topic arises as to who might follow Sultan Qaboos, a common reaction is a conversation-ending "may he live forever." The Sultanate has historically lacked a crown prince system like many of its neighbors, and succession as an issue is commonly avoided not least because of its potential to recall the forcible start of the current reign 37 years ago. That said, some speculation is inevitable and in recent years has expanded from examining the possibilities of immediate members of the Al-Said family of the current Sultan's generation to include their sons. Recent Embassy contact with Sayyid Taimur bin Asad bin Tariq, a young prince whose profile is especially high, seems an opportune time to provide background and context regarding someone increasingly seen by many as a front-runner among the second generation of royals who could potentially assume the Al-Said throne. End Summary.

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STARTING AT THE TOP AND MARRYING UP  
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¶2. (S) Sayyid Taimur bin Asad bin Tariq al-Said (born c. 1980) is a second cousin of Sultan Qaboos. Sayyid Taimur is considered by many Omanis to be the leading candidate in his generation for the succession, particularly if that transition takes place after his father and uncles (the "bin Tariqs," long seen as leading contenders) have passed the age when they would be considered viable successors. His father, Sayyid Asad, carries out official public duties as Representative of His Majesty; his uncles include Sayyid Haitham (Minister of Heritage and Culture) and Sayyid Shihab (Adviser to the Sultan and former commander of the navy). Together, the three are the most prominent of the six "bin Tariq" brothers; they range in age from 54 to 51.

¶3. (S) Sayyid Taimur is married to Salma bint Mustahail bin Ahmed al-Mashani. Her father is the brother and senior surviving male relative of the Sultan, s revered late mother, Shaikha Mazoon. Their 2004 marriage was among the highest-profile royal events in recent years. Its lavishness led to its being referred to by Muscatis with good-natured sarcasm as "Alf Laila wa Laila" ("The 1001 Nights"). The festivities, which were largely funded by and some of which were attended by the Sultan, included fireworks displays and four days of parties and receptions. It is widely believed that the match was made personally by the Sultan and that it has markedly strengthened Sayyid Taimur's position within his generation of the family.

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IT'S GOOD TO BE PRINCE  
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¶4. (S) Sayyid Taimur is associated with (but holds no

official title at) the Oman Research Council, handling international conferences and presiding at public events. Observed in action at a spring 2007 mathematics conference, he was well-spoken and at ease with the academic lecturers (including Americans) present. His other professional associations include serving on the Board of Directors of Bank Dhofar, one of the largest financial institutions in the country. He presides at occasional official events that call for the presence of a royal, but not a senior-most one. As such, he is significantly more familiar to Omanis via the media than most of his generation.

15. (S) In person, Sayyid Taimur is personable, affable, and informal. Something over six feet tall, he is markedly overweight but apparently vigorous. His English, while strongly accented for an elite young Omani (many of whom speak with virtually no trace of Arabic accent), is fluent. He is a fixture of Muscat's limited nightlife, including both private parties and bars and nightclubs. He drives himself in a late-model BMW whose license plate is "1 HH". He has made only two brief trips to the U.S., one as a child to Houston for unspecified medical reasons and one in recent years to Washington DC only.

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EDUCATION: TIME TO KNUCKLE DOWN  
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16. (S) A graduate of Muscat International School (rather than the more elite - but more academically challenging - Sultan's School), Sayyid Taimur spent four years in higher education in the United Kingdom. He studied in Brighton and in Galashiels in the Scottish lowlands before finishing his undergraduate studies at the (unaccredited) American College

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of London. He was, by his own admission, not a diligent student. In conversation, he notes having failed several courses and, as a result, having taken his degree in public relations rather than international affairs.

17. (S) As of 2007, he is increasingly sensitive about the shortcomings of his undergraduate experience, stating frankly, for example, to an EmbOff that his association with the Oman Research Council comes by royal decree rather than by personal qualification. As a result, in December 2007 he approached the Embassy for information regarding graduate study in the U.S. He hopes to pursue a master's degree, with a concentration in leadership, management, and organizational skills. He is apparently sincere in wanting to make up for the perceived inadequacy of his academic qualifications for his position (current and future).

18. (S) Sayyid Taimur hopes that his wife will join him in the U.S. and study toward an MBA. She is a graduate of Sultan Qaboos University and is considered extremely bright by post contacts who were secondary-school colleagues. She attended high school at the Shatti Government Girls School, a family decision seen by her peers as a move to broaden her horizon beyond earlier private and boarding schools.

19. (S) Comment: Sayyid Taimur is not infrequently mentioned as a possible successor to Sultan Qaboos, who is 67, in the event that he rules for much longer and the family looks to skip the likely candidates among the current generation. The unusual involvement of the Sultan in Taimur's marriage suggests not only the Sultan's tacit blessing of the young prince, but also more indirectly of the prince's father, Sayyid Asad. Regardless of the Sultan's intentions, however, this very atypical public blessing of a royal has convinced many Omanis that Taimur enjoys a special place among royals. In future years, we would expect to see him attending major events with the Sultan if indeed he is intended for loftier positions.

GRAPPO